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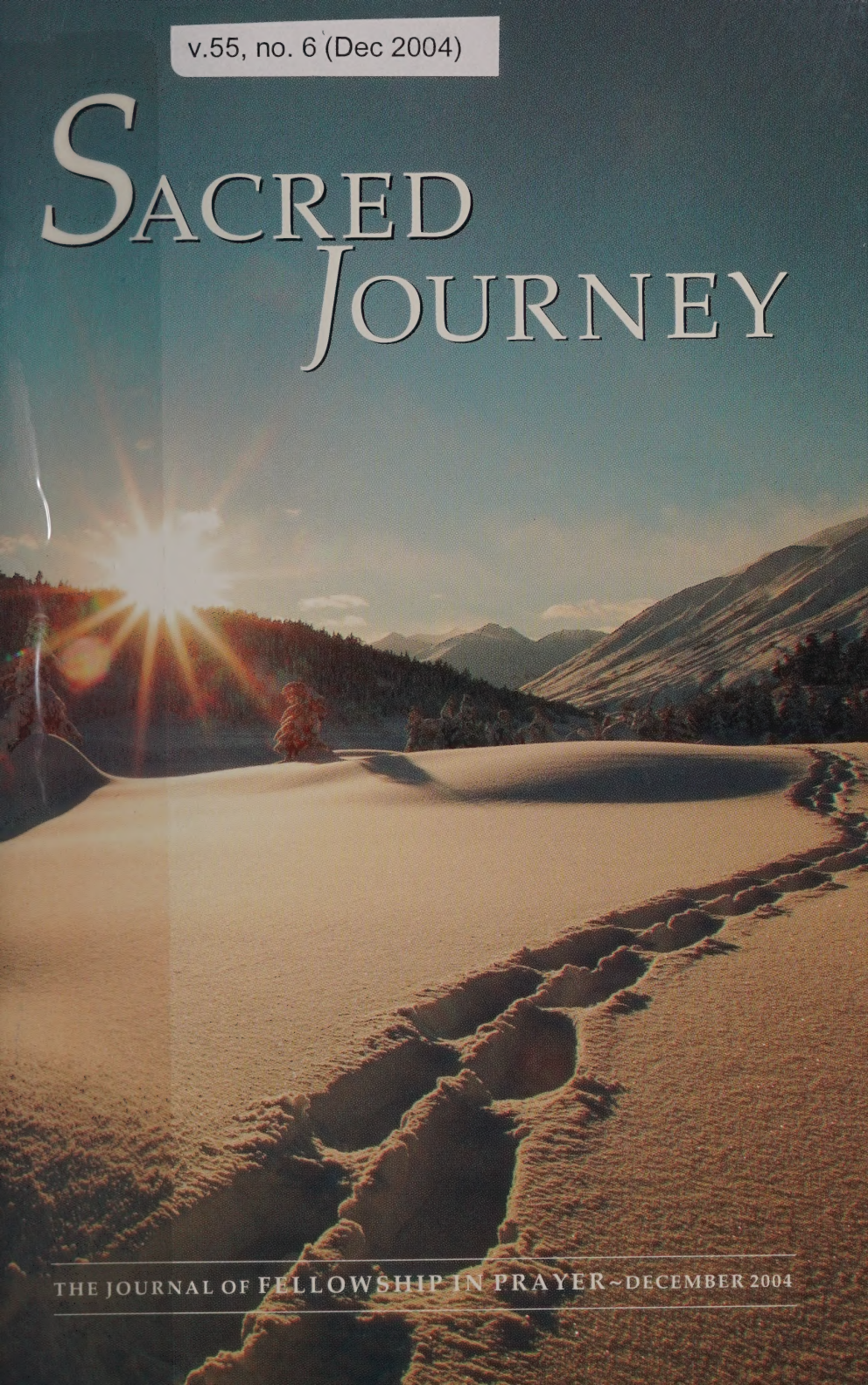

THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER ~ DECEMBER 2004

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THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

The mission of Fellowship in Prayer is

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a spiritual orientation to life,

to promote the practice of

prayer,

meditation,

and service to others,

and to help bring about

a deeper spirit of unity

among humankind.

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Cover photo by Ron Niebrugge, http://www.wildnatureimages.com

"Blessed are the Peacemakers"

"Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God." *Matthew 5:9*

What are we really seeking when we pray for peace? After months of reading all manner of writing about peace and its counterpart, violence—in the media (whose stories, sadly, are overwhelmingly about violence and war, not peace), in books of stories, poetry, and prayers; and scattered far and wide on the internet—it occurred to me this morning to ask this simple question.

The first answer that came to mind was: an end to conflict. Well then, between whom? Warring nations, of course; but as I think further, I know it's more than that. What about ending conflict within communities, and even closer to home, within families? And then, perhaps most fundamental, most uncomfortable, and easiest to ignore is the answer that's closest to home, and for which I have full control and responsibility: ending conflict both within myself and created by me.

Conflict starts somewhere. It's easy and safe and distant to say it starts between nations, or regions, or even communities; but who wants to say that they

themselves are responsible either for creating or contributing to conflict, at any level of society? Do you? If not, then who *is* responsible? Because conflict is created and perpetuated by individuals. Me. You.

Right about here, denial kicks in, and a plethora of excuses arise. Not me. I want peace. I don't start arguments or engage in them—at least, not *that* often. And I certainly don't start wars. But someone does. Who is that "someone"?

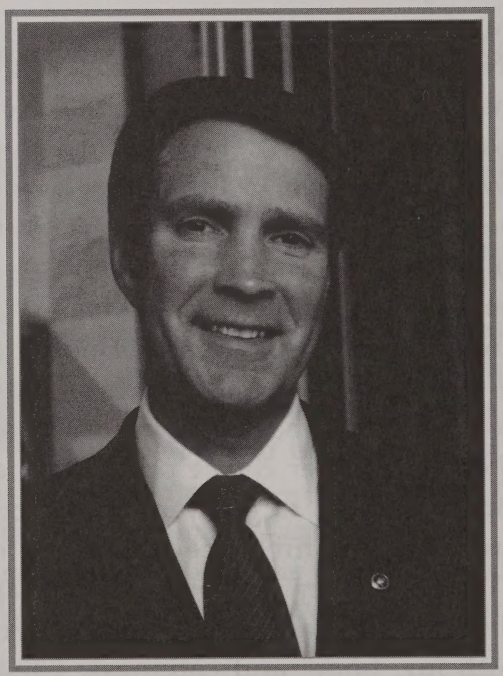
Thich Nhat Hanh, Buddhist monk, says that each of us contains both the seeds for war and the seeds for peace, and the ones that flourish are the ones we cultivate. Why do we give water to the seeds of violence? Possibly because cultivating peace is hard work—very hard work. It requires strength, courage, humility, compassion, patience, and accountability to oneself and others. It requires mindful living, bringing awareness into every moment. Every day, each of us makes the choice to water either our seeds of peace or those of fear, anger, or violence. Either choice profoundly affects our relationship to ourself, to our family and community, and to our world. Which seeds do you choose to cultivate? Which journey do you prefer to take?

I'm listening to Pachelbel's canon as I write this. It fills me with joy, hope, and calmness. I look out my window at a gorgeous blue sky and imagine eternity blanketing me with love. Today I choose peace, and if I'm blessed with a tomorrow, I will do my best to make that choice again. Maybe it will make a difference.

While you are proclaiming peace with your lips, be careful to have it even more fully in your heart.

~ St. Francis of Assisi

William H. Frist



OUR INTERVIEW:
Senate Majority Leader
William H. Frist

Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, M.D. was born in 1952 in Nashville, Tennessee and was raised in a family dedicated to helping people. His earliest memories are of his father, after finishing dinner with his family, leaving with his black doctor's bag in hand to make his nightly rounds on patients at the hospital. This sense of service to others has been the driving force in Frist's life.

True to the family profession, Frist begin his career in medicine while enrolled in Princeton University where he specialized in health care policy at the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs. During a summer internship in Washington, D.C., his Tennessee Congressman advised him that, should he ever want to serve in Congress, he should first excel in a profession other than politics and bring that experience to Washington.

In 1978 Frist graduated with honors from Harvard Medical School and spent the next seven years in surgical training at Massachusetts General Hospital; Southampton General Hospital, England; and Stanford University Medical Center where he found his medical calling in transplant surgery. He moved back to Nashville and eventually founded the Vanderbilt Transplant Center, one of the premier transplant facilities in the U.S. As a heart

and lung surgeon, Dr. Frist has performed over 150 heart and lung transplant procedures.

After twenty years in medicine, Frist was devoting his life to what he cared about most: helping people; but he felt he could do even more for medicine, and for the people of the U.S., in public office. In 1994 he became the first practicing physician elected to the U.S. Senate since 1928. He rose rapidly through Senate leadership and, in December 2002, was unanimously elected Majority Leader after having served fewer total years than any previous leader.

Frist is especially passionate about confronting the global AIDS pandemic. He frequently takes medical mission trips to Africa to perform surgery and care for those in need. In the Senate, he continues to raise awareness about the HIV/AIDS crisis throughout the world.

Frist has written more than 100 articles, chapters, and abstracts on medical research, and five books: Transplant; Grand Rounds in Transplantation; Tennessee Senators, 1911-2001: Portraits of Leadership in a Century of Change; When Every Moment Counts *(a family guide on bioterrorism); and* Good People Beget Good People.

Senator Frist and his wife, Karyn, have three sons: Harrison, Jonathan, and Bryan. They are members of the National Presbyterian Church. He enjoys flying (as a commercial, instrument, and multi-engine pilot), running (seven marathons), medical mission trips to Africa, and writing.

Senator Frist and Louise Hutner (ed.) were classmates at Princeton University and they recently crossed paths at their 30th reunion. When Louise mentioned her work on Sacred Journey, *and our mission "to promote the practice of prayer, meditation, and service to others," he became quite animated and readily agreed to this interview.*

Louise Hutner: Today, when I said the word *prayer* your eyes lit up. What is that about?

Senator Frist: Prayer and religion are such an integral part of my life. And it is often something that I do not get to talk about with others in the course of my daily business. Each and every day I pray for guidance, wisdom, and strength.

I was intrigued about the idea of being interviewed not just about religion, but specifically about prayer. There is something intensely personal about prayer that I find powerful. And it is central in everything I do, whether as a husband and father, a doctor, or a public servant.

What is your religious background?

I come from a strong Christian background. Religion played a central role in both of my parent's lives, and especially on my father's side of the family where his brother was a Presbyterian minister. In fact, my father used to wear a pin recognizing that he had not missed one day of Sunday school from age three to 18. That's hard to imagine.

My parents always emphasized that our faith not just be reflected in prayer and church, but in action. We were taught to live as Christians, and to treat others in a way that showed reverence and respect for all of God's creations.

How important was religion or spirituality in your formative years?

Religion and service to others were central to my

upbringing. In particular, my father's work as a doctor emphasized how religion should serve as an inspiration of action, and helped me realize the importance of living a life of service.

What is the role of prayer in your life today? What forms does your prayer take? Is it a formal process, a conversational one, or a variety of forms?

I pray each day, a prayer of thanks for all of the gifts God has given me and my family. I pray for the continued safety, security, and prosperity of America and our allies throughout the world. I pray that God guide the leaders of all nations so that we may diffuse confrontation and achieve a full peace between all the world's peoples. And I pray that God continue to watch over all of God's creations, independent of country of origin, race, religion, or creed.

It would be hard to overstate the central role prayer plays in my life. I strive to carry out my position as Majority Leader humbly, and do it asking for wisdom each day.

Of course, prayer has been a steadying force throughout my life. My father always taught us to pray not for things we need, but for all of the blessings we have.

My prayer is both formal and informal. In my work as a heart surgeon, I always tried to recognize the momentous role God played in the operating room. During every heart transplant, there came the precious moment of truth—the time for the transplanted heart to come alive again in another's body. Although I had performed the operation before, I said a silent prayer every time. The prayer was for life and for the humility

to recognize the presence of God in all that we did.

Of course, I engage in more formal prayer too. For example, when I found out that my colleagues wanted me to assume the position of majority leader in the United States Senate, my wife Karyn and I went to church to pray for guidance. While I was there, I kept thinking of the words from Proverbs: "In his heart, a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps." This is an example of a deeply personal and life-altering decision that was influenced by formal prayer. At the same time, prayer plays a role in my daily life just as much as it does in these major life decisions.

It's clear that prayer is a vital, foundational element in your life. Do you discuss or participate in prayer with your colleagues—for example, doesn't the Senate have a weekly prayer breakfast?

It would be impossible for me—as well as all 99 of my colleagues—to remove religion and prayer from our daily lives. The degree to which faith impacts each member varies. For some, prayer is a powerful influence. For others, it is a peripheral influence. Still, religion is omnipresent in the Capitol and in our history as an institution.

We serve in a secular institution. However, each morning the Senate is in session, the Senate Chaplain, Admiral Barry Black, leads us in a prayer. I am fond of pointing out that our Constitution calls upon government to maintain neutrality among religions, not hostility to religion itself.

I also attend a prayer breakfast every Wednesday morning. My Senate colleagues and I spend an hour of

fellowship together beginning at 8:00 am. Our group usually consists of about 16 Senators. It's non-partisan, highly personal, and completely private. And it's one of those consistent occasions on which members of both parties gather to share a meal.

When you're making decisions on the Senate floor, is there a spiritual context or process for your decision-making?

As a Christian, I believe I have a duty to answer God's call—a call to devote everything we have, everything we do, everything we are to the service of God. It would be impossible for me to separate the spiritual context from any of my work—whether as a doctor or a senator. When I assumed my position as majority leader in the Senate, I strove to employ values-based leadership. In other words, I have deep faith that human beings can fulfill their spiritual purpose to God even with secular responsibilities.

I am very serious about my faith and recognize that it influences my decision-making. Now, that doesn't mean I wear my faith on my sleeve. I don't preface everything I think, say, and do with the statement that I am doing this as a "Christian." I don't feel I need to. But I can tell you that everything I do reflects my background, my faith, and my spirituality.

The medical world can now document the effect of prayer on an individual's health. Do you think that widespread, interfaith prayer could have a powerful impact on the health of our society, and beyond, on our troubled world?

Absolutely. I think prayer could have a tremendously powerful impact on the way we as human beings act and behave in the world. Regardless of faith or religious background, prayer reflects our understanding as human beings that we are part of a larger cause—that we are vessels for serving a greater purpose. Prayer offers us an opportunity to reflect and gain a better understanding of our relationships with each other, with society, and with God.

There is great pain in the world and much we can do. And ultimately, governments and laws cannot change individuals' hearts or actions. Moral change will begin with the support of strong families and communities. As a society, we must care for one another and treat all human life with respect, dignity, and compassion—and I think prayer is certainly an essential component of initiating that growth.

As one of our country's leaders, would you consider calling on all Americans—and further, on people everywhere—to pray in their own faith traditions for peace and healing worldwide?

Prayer has an immeasurable impact on our capacity as human beings to act righteously and improve our world. And it is my belief that genuine believers in the world's religious traditions say prayers each and every day for the spread of peace and healing. I believe that all of the world's religious traditions call for prayer and the spread of values that reflect an understanding of the sacredness of human life and of the gifts that God has bestowed upon us. I always enjoy attending the National Prayer Breakfast—it serves as a strong

reminder that what distinguishes the people of the world is far less than what unites us.

How can you, as Majority Leader Frist, help bring about this blossoming of the human qualities that are needed to bring peace to our troubled world?

It's an uncertain world, one where we simply can't predict what's going to happen next. In my position as Majority Leader I strive each day to recognize and remember that. I strive to carry out this position humbly and I do it asking for God's wisdom and guidance. It's easy for us as human beings to get our eyes fixed on ourselves. But when we remember that we will be long forgotten, but our deeds have eternal consequences, then it puts our work in a whole new perspective. It is my hope and prayer that I lead each day from a place of humility, introspection, and honesty—one that reflects my understanding that I am here to help achieve God's plan. By embracing the path God has plotted for me, it's my hope that I can lead from a place of greater honesty and effectiveness. This in turn empowers me to help further God's plan for greater peace and brotherhood.

Louise Hutner, Princeton University Chapel

PRAYERS for PEACE

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be known as the children of God. But I say to you that hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To those who strike you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from those who take away your cloak, do not withhold your coat as well. Give to everyone who begs from you, and of those who take away your goods, do not ask them again. And as you wish that others would do to you, so do to them.

~ *Christian*

In the name of Allah, the beneficent, the merciful, praise be to the Lord of the universe who has created us and made us into tribes and nations, that we may know each other, not that we may despise each other. If the enemy incline towards peace, do thou also incline towards peace, and trust God, for the Lord is the one that heareth and knoweth all things. And the servants of God, Most Gracious, are those who walk on the earth in humility, and when we address them, we say "peace."

~ *Muslim*

O God, let us be united; let us speak in harmony; let our minds apprehend alike; common be our prayer, common the end of our assembly; common be our resolution; common be our deliberation; alike be our feelings; unified be our hearts; common be our intentions; perfect be our unity.

~ *Hindu*

Come let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, that we may walk the paths of the Most High. And we shall beat our swords into ploughshares and our spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation—neither shall they learn war any more. And none shall be afraid, for the mouth of the Lord of Hosts has spoken.

~ *Jewish*

Grandfather, look at our brokenness. We know that in all creation only the human family has strayed from the Sacred Way. We know that we are the ones who are divided and we are the ones who must come back together to walk in the Sacred Way. Grandfather, Sacred One, teach us love, compassion, and honor, that we may heal the earth and heal each other.

~ *Ojibway*

God adjudges us according to our deeds, not the coat that we wear: that truth is above everything, but higher still is truthful living. Know that we attaineth God when we loveth, and only that victory endures in consequences of which no one is defeated.

~ *Sikh*

We pray to God to eradicate all the misery in the world: that understanding triumph over ignorance, that generosity triumph over indifference, that trust triumph over contempt, and that truth triumph over falsehood.

~ *Zoroastrian*

Keep us, Lord, so awake in the duties of our callings that we may thus sleep in thy peace and wake in thy glory.

~ *John Donne 1572-1631*

The Christmas Truce

Aaron Shepard

The Christmas Truce of 1914 is one of the most remarkable incidents of World War I and perhaps of all military history. Starting in some places on Christmas Eve and in others on Christmas Day, the truce covered as much as two-thirds of the British-German front, with thousands of soldiers taking part. Perhaps most remarkably, it grew out of no single initiative but sprang up in each place spontaneously and independently. Nearly everything described here is drawn from first-hand accounts in letters and diaries of the time.

A false idea about the truce is that it was unique in history. Though the Christmas Truce is the greatest example of its kind, informal truces had been a longstanding military tradition. During the American Civil War, for instance, Rebels and Yankees traded tobacco, coffee, and newspapers, fished peacefully on opposite sides of a stream, and even gathered blackberries together. Some degree of fellow feeling had always been common among soldiers sent to battle.

All of that has changed in modern times. Today, soldiers kill at great distances, often with the push of a button and a sighting on a computer screen. No, we should not expect to see another Christmas Truce. Yet still, what happened on that Christmas of 1914 may inspire the peacemakers of today—for now, as always, the best time to make peace is long before the armies go to war.

Aaron Shepard is a children's author who has been writing children's stories since the late 1980s. He feels very blessed to be doing work he loves. If there is one thing he wants to tell young people, it is this: Follow your dreams!

A Letter Home

Christmas Day, 1914

My dear sister Janet,

It is 2:00 in the morning and most of our men are asleep in their dugouts—yet I could not sleep myself before writing to you of the wonderful events of Christmas Eve. In truth, what happened seems almost like a fairy tale, and if I hadn't been through it myself, I would scarce believe it. Just imagine: While you and the family sang carols before the fire there in London, I did the same with enemy soldiers here on the battlefields of France!

As I wrote before, there has been little serious fighting of late. The first battles of the war left so many dead that both sides have held back until replacements could come from home. So we have mostly stayed in our trenches and waited.

But what a terrible waiting it has been! Knowing that any moment an artillery shell might land and explode beside us in the trench, killing or maiming several men. And in daylight not daring to lift our heads above ground, for fear of a sniper's bullet.

And the rain—it has fallen almost daily. Of course, it collects right in our trenches, where we must bail it out with pots and pans. And with the rain has come mud—a good foot or more deep. It splatters and cakes everything, and constantly sucks at our boots. One new recruit got his feet stuck in it, and then his hands too when he tried to get out—just like in that American story of the tar baby!

Through all this, we couldn't help feeling curious

about the German soldiers across the way. After all, they faced the same dangers we did, and slogged about in the same muck. What's more, their first trench was only 50 yards from ours. Between us lay No Man's Land, bordered on both sides by barbed wire—yet they were close enough we sometimes heard their voices.

Of course, we hated them when they killed our friends. But other times, we joked about them and almost felt we had something in common. And now it seems they felt the same.

Just yesterday morning—Christmas Eve Day—we had our first good freeze. Cold as we were, we welcomed it, because at least the mud froze solid. Everything was tinged white with frost, while a bright sun shone over all. Perfect Christmas weather.

During the day, there was little shelling or rifle fire from either side. And as darkness fell on our Christmas Eve, the shooting stopped entirely. Our first complete silence in months! We hoped it might promise a peaceful holiday, but we didn't count on it. We'd been told the Germans might attack and try to catch us off guard.

I went to the dugout to rest, and lying on my cot, I must have drifted asleep. All at once my friend John was shaking me awake, saying, "Come and see! See what the Germans are doing!" I grabbed my rifle, stumbled out into the trench, and stuck my head cautiously above the sandbags.

I never hope to see a stranger and more lovely sight. Clusters of tiny lights were shining all along the German line, left and right as far as the eye could see.

"What is it?" I asked in bewilderment, and John answered, "Christmas trees!"

Robert F. Campbell

And so it was. The Germans had placed Christmas trees in front of their trenches, lit by candle or lantern like beacons of good will.

And then we heard their voices raised in song.

Stille nacht, heilige nacht . . .

This carol may not yet be familiar to us in Britain, but John knew it and translated: "Silent night, holy night." I've never heard one lovelier—or more meaningful, in that quiet, clear night, its dark softened by a first-quarter moon.

When the song finished, the men in our trenches applauded. Yes, British soldiers applauding Germans! Then one of our own men started singing, and we all joined in.

The first Nowell, the angel did say . . .

In truth, we sounded not nearly as good as the Germans, with their fine harmonies. But they responded with enthusiastic applause of their own and then began another.

O Tannenbaum, o Tannenbaum . . .

Then we replied.

O come all ye faithful . . .

But this time they joined in, singing the same words in Latin.

Adeste fideles . . .

British and German harmonizing across No Man's Land! I would have thought nothing could be more amazing—but what came next was more so.

"English, come over!" we heard one of them shout. "You no shoot, we no shoot."

There in the trenches, we looked at each other in bewilderment. Then one of us shouted jokingly, "You come over here."

To our astonishment, we saw two figures rise from

the trench, climb over their barbed wire, and advance unprotected across No Man's Land. One of them called, "Send officer to talk."

I saw one of our men lift his rifle to the ready, and no doubt others did the same—but our captain called out, "Hold your fire." Then he climbed out and went to meet the Germans halfway. We heard them talking, and a few minutes later, the captain came back with a German cigar in his mouth!

"We've agreed there will be no shooting before midnight tomorrow," he announced. "But sentries are to remain on duty, and the rest of you, stay alert."

Across the way, we could make out groups of two or three men starting out of trenches and coming toward us. Then some of us were climbing out too, and in minutes more, there we were in No Man's Land, over a hundred soldiers and officers of each side, shaking hands with men we'd been trying to kill just hours earlier!

Before long a bonfire was built, and around it we mingled—British khaki and German gray. I must say, the Germans were the better dressed, with fresh uniforms for the holiday.

Only a couple of our men knew German, but more of the Germans knew English. I asked one of them why that was.

"Because many have worked in England!" he said. "Before all this, I was a waiter at the Hotel Cecil. Perhaps I waited on your table!"

"Perhaps you did!" I said, laughing.

He told me he had a girlfriend in London and that the war had interrupted their plans for marriage. I told him, "Don't worry. We'll have you beat by Easter, then

you can come back and marry the girl."

He laughed at that. Then he asked if I'd send her a postcard he'd give me later, and I promised I would.

Another German had been a porter at Victoria Station. He showed me a picture of his family back in Munich. His eldest sister was so lovely, I said I should like to meet her someday. He beamed and said he would like that very much and gave me his family's address.

Even those who could not converse could still exchange gifts—our cigarettes for their cigars, our tea for their coffee, our corned beef for their sausage. Badges and buttons from uniforms changed owners, and one of our lads walked off with the infamous spiked helmet! I myself traded a jackknife for a leather equipment belt—a fine souvenir to show when I get home.

Newspapers too changed hands, and the Germans howled with laughter at ours. They assured us that France was finished and Russia nearly beaten too. We told them that was nonsense, and one of them said, "Well, you believe your newspapers and we'll believe ours."

Clearly they are lied to—yet after meeting these men, I wonder how truthful our own newspapers have been. These are not the "savage barbarians" we've read so much about. They are men with homes and families, hopes and fears, principles and, yes, love of country. In other words, men like ourselves. Why are we led to believe otherwise?

As it grew late, a few more songs were traded around the fire, and then all joined in for—I am not lying to you—"Auld Lang Syne." Then we parted with promises to meet again tomorrow, and even some talk

of a football match.

I was just starting back to the trenches when an older German clutched my arm. "My God," he said, "why cannot we have peace and all go home?"

I told him gently, "That you must ask your emperor."

He looked at me then, searchingly. "Perhaps, my friend. But also we must ask our hearts."

And so, dear sister, tell me, has there ever been such a Christmas Eve in all history? And what does it all mean, this impossible befriending of enemies?

For the fighting here, of course, it means regrettably little. Decent fellows those soldiers may be, but they follow orders and we do the same. Besides, we are here to stop their army and send it home, and never could we shirk that duty.

Still, one cannot help imagine what would happen if the spirit shown here were caught by the nations of the world. Of course, disputes must always arise. But what if our leaders were to offer well wishes in place of warnings? Songs in place of slurs? Presents in place of reprisals? Would not all war end at once?

All nations say they want peace. Yet on this Christmas morning, I wonder if we want it quite enough.

Your loving brother,

Tom

While this is a work of historical fiction, nearly everything described here is drawn from first-hand accounts in letters and diaries of the time. Copyright © 2001, 2003 by Aaron Shepard. This story may be freely copied and shared for any noncommercial purpose. For more stories and resources, visit Aaron online at www.aaronshep.com.

One Light

Steve Goodier

Imagine an artist painting a winter scene. She depicts a white, frozen ground and evergreens draped in snow. Her hand brings the day to a close as she paints night falling on the canvas. In the deep shadows of dusk, she has painted a grim log cabin, barely visible to the casual observer.

Then she dips her brush in yellow paint and, with a few quick strokes, places a brightly burning lamp in one of the cabin's windows. Warm rays dance on white snow, now made brighter by the light. The lonely lamp wholly changes the tone of the picture, replacing feelings of dark and gloom with warmth and security.

Edith Wharton has said that there are two ways of spreading the light: to be the candle or the mirror that reflects it. Sometimes we are candles. We shed light of love and hope. We shine encouragement into dark souls; or we illuminate with insight.

But sometimes we reflect the light. We are mirrors to enable others to see the light of their own goodness and beauty. And when we have no other light of our own, we are mirrors which reflect a greater Light.

For some, the world can be bleak and cold. They feel frightened, lonely, and even hopeless. But it's true that no amount of darkness can extinguish the light of one small candle. You?

Steve Goodier is an author and professional speaker with a B.A. in anthropology and sociology and an M.Div. degree from Emory University. Visit him online at http://LifeSupportSystem.com *or call (877) 344-0989.*

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ILLUMINATIONS

Nothing that I can do will change the structure of the universe. But maybe, by raising my voice, I can help in the greatest of all causes—goodwill among men and peace on earth.

~ Albert Einstein

While you are proclaiming peace with your lips, be careful to have it even more fully in your heart.

~ Francis of Assisi

All things pertaining to spiritual progress in life depend upon peace.

~ Hazrat Inayat Khan, Sufi

Peace demands the most heroic labor and the most difficult sacrifice. It demands greater heroism than war. It demands greater fidelity to the truth and a much more perfect purity of conscience.

~ Thomas Merton

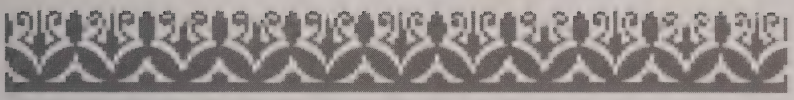
We do not need guns and bombs to bring peace, we need love and compassion. Let us radiate the peace of God and so light His light and extinguish all hatred and love of power in the world and in the hearts of all men.

~ Mother Teresa

To end that eternal conflict between our self and the world, to restore the peace that passeth all understanding, to unite ourseves with nature so as to form one endless whole—that is the goal of all our striving.

~ Friedrich Holderlin

Louise Hutner, Princeton University Chapel



Something More

Ruth Naylor

Every once in awhile something happens that makes my heart beat a little lighter and brings inspiration to the average day. Such was the case today.

While I was serving on the pastoral staff at our church, I took a training course in spiritual guidance. And in retirement I've continued to offer spiritual direction to those who want to deepen their sense of God's presence and direction in their lives. Today, a pastor from another denomination in a nearby city was ready to leave my home. Our hour together was finished and she was looking through her purse. "I seem to have forgotten my checkbook," she said.

"That's okay," I replied quickly. "You remember that I don't charge anyway. Anything you ever leave for me is purely gift. Just forget it this time."

She ignored my offer and began sorting through the cash in her billfold. Slightly flustered, she said, "Without my check record, I can't even remember how much I usually pay you."

Trying to put her at ease, I told her that she usually leaves me $35, but now I was slightly embarrassed as well. "Just let it go," I urged. "You are an inspiration

Ruth Naylor is a retired English teacher who changed careers in mid-life and was ordained. She is now a retired pastor who continues to be a spiritual director, having received her certification from the ecumenical Shalem Institute for Spiritual Guidance.

to me, and I'm happy that you find benefit in coming."

"I don't have the right change," she explained as she laid two bills, a twenty and a ten, on the end table beside her. "I'll leave this for you now and then next time I'll give you more."

We hugged and she left. I blew out the Christ-light candle, picked up the money, straightened the cushions on the couch, and picked up our two teacups to return them to the kitchen. As I was rinsing them out at the sink, the doorbell rang.

This attractive young pastor, in her early thirties, was still a bit ruffled, but she was smiling. "Without telling you the whole story behind this," she said, "I want to pay you more rather than less." She pushed another bill into my hand, her eyes reflecting the joy of acting on spiritual impulse.

Glancing down, I saw that it was another twenty. I was speechless. But I was also curious. Although she needed to be on her way, she agreed to explain briefly. "It is budget planning time in our church," she said, "and in last Sunday's sermon, our lead pastor shared a recent experience that is related to support of Kingdom work." This is the story she related to me:

An unchurched man in the community had called First Church* to see if he could consult with Rev. Smith* about a personal family matter that was troubling him. The church secretary made the necessary arrangements and at the appointed time a well-dressed gentleman appeared.

Behind closed doors, the pastor and his visitor talked for a long time. When the conversation seemed to be winding down, this successful businessman turned to the pastor and in a magnanimous voice said, "Rev. Smith, I really appreciate the time you've given

me this afternoon. You've helped me a lot." His voice brightened as he continued, "I'd like to make a contribution to your church if I may."

Rev. Smith was more than willing to accept his gift. It was obvious that the man was well to do, and the Finance Committee would be more than happy to channel the money into some worthwhile Kingdom project.

The businessman reached for his billfold and pulled out a twenty-dollar bill. "Have you got change for a twenty?" he asked. The pastor was somewhat taken aback, but felt for his own billfold only to find that he'd left it at home.

"That's all right," the businessman assured him. I'll drop something off later in the week."

A few days later when the pastor returned from lunch, his secretary informed him that the man had just been in to leave a contribution in appreciation for the time the pastor had spent with him. On his desk, the pastor found an envelope containing a ten-dollar bill.

My pastor friend chuckled and said, "So now you know why I want to give you more rather than less."

We hugged again. I thanked her for the story and for the unexpected gift. She went back to her car and I went back into the kitchen knowing that I was feeling a new burst of generosity myself. I know that in the days ahead there will be unexpected opportunities to pass on that feeling of goodwill that comes with generous Kingdom giving.

* Names in this true story are fictitious.

Sacrifices Made

Yakov Azriel

"This is the Torah of the burnt-offering, the meal-offering, the sin-offering, the guilt-offering, the offering of ordination, and the sacrifice of well-being."
Leviticus 7:37

I've brought no oxen, cattle, sheep or goats
To sacrifice to You; nor do I bring
Choice offerings of barley, wheat or oats
To burn on altar-fire, while Levites sing.

But this I've brought for You, my God of Truth:
I sacrificed those former truths that might
Have been my guiding truths and ruled my youth,
My afternoon, my evening hours, my night.

Perhaps my truth rings false, and all I say
Is wind; perhaps my thoughts are flimsy reeds
That break when touched by wind at end of day;
Perhaps these broken reeds may pierce my deeds.

But though my truth may still be flawed, before
Your Truth I bow and sacrifice in awe.

Singing

Mary Jo Grant

From God's dreaming mind we come
Our soul flowing into earth form
on rays of light
and love

From Creation's Holy heart we come
Our spirit soaring into life form
on notes of jubilation
and joy

We come
God's Dream
Singing

Yakov Azriel is a widely published poet with a B.A. in English literature, an M.A. in Jewish thought, and a Ph.D. in Judaica. He moved from the U.S. to Israel where he lives with his wife and children. His book of spiritual poetry, Threads From A Coat Of Many Colors, *is due to be published by Time Being Books by the end of 2004.*

Mary Jo Grant has a Ph.D. in archetypal psychology and practices psychospiritual counseling. She is married to an attorney and is the mother of two and the grandmother of four grandsons.

Crossing Cambridge Common

Alexander Levering Kern

You did not want to leave your mother
alone at church with all her friends
but she had business to do,
and your naptime called,
so away we go, father with baby boy
confined in backseat oblivion
alone. By your cries one would think I'm bearing you
away to captivity in Babylon. Not so, I say,

and your temper cools as we wend our way
through Cambridge Common, maze of spires and ivy,
dodging great minds and fur coats that float across quads
like ancient hymns, half-remembered.

With your purple velvet overalls and rainbow striped shirt,
wild platinum hair and tantrum tears
you look the Holy Fool, baby friar,
budding Buddha in the backseat
on a bad day.

At the stoplight, a woman approaches our car
carrying a cardboard sign of the times,
lettered green and red for holiday shoppers:
"Homeless Mother, Four Children, Help Me."
Her name, Rebecca, is your mother's own.

Startled, I look up from this family crest

to catch her eyes glowing
holy and cool, like a she-wolf,
or wild mendicant beneath
a brown cowl of matted hair.
I pass her coins, she passes me peace,
a simple benediction:
"Thank you, God bless you, Merry Christmas."

Glancing back at you
through the rearview mirror,
I see only your tears
dangling from eyelashes
as you sleep now, at last.

Alexander Levering Kern is a poet, a Quaker, a theological educator, and a peace activist deeply involved in nurturing contemplative spirituality, and interfaith and ecumenical dialogue. He teaches practical theology and counsels graduate students at Andover Newton Theological School in Massachusetts, where he lives with his wife Rebecca and baby son Elias.

Embracing the Eternal Now

Susan Rush

As Stillness

According to Fr. Thomas Keating, in centering prayer "we open our awareness to the Ultimate Mystery whom we know by faith is within us, closer than breathing, closer than thinking, closer than choosing, closer than consciousness itself . . . the ground in which our being is rooted, the source from whom our life emerges at every moment."

If only we could remember that—all the time. But somewhere along the line we have a tendency to forget about the Divine indwelling. So, we ask ourselves, "How can we remember?"

I know of no other way than some sort of stilling practice, some sort of interior reflection. When we are faithful to a stilling practice, then extending compassionate presence with a contemplative heart becomes a restful way to walk the walk of life. Then, there is a desire to serve. Then, there is a desire to love. And when it comes from that true nature of ours, it isn't a strain. There's movement within us. We understand the beatitudes in our hearts and we want to embrace them in our lives.

Susan Rush is Coordinator of Contemplative Outreach of New Mexico, whose "primary purpose is to teach the method of centering prayer and to offer practices that bring its fruits into daily life." Visit them on the web at: www.centeringnm.com.

I believe that in order to extend compassionate presence with a contemplative heart we must keep our reservoir of interior silence topped off.

As Listening

Hurrying can be a hindrance to the holy. Our lives are filled with constant activity. We are moving fast, speeding into the future. We forget about tasting our words before we speak them. We forget about touch and kindness. We forget to listen.

Only when we interrupt the busyness, only when we pause, in stillness and silence, can we listen. Taking time to listen isn't routine for most of us, and yet listening for true wisdom to reveal itself involves a slowing down, a waiting, a practice of patience. According to Fr. Keating, "Only at the level of interior silence can we fully hear wisdom teaching." Being still inside is the purest form of listening.

We know how to listen for answers, but interior silence takes us a step further. It allows us to listen for the questions. As Rainer Maria Rilke advised the young poet, "Live the question now . . . perhaps you will then, gradually, without noticing it, live long some day into the answer." We live into that answer, knowing that we ourselves are unable to do any spiritual work on our own. We are totally dependent on the Divine Spirit. And centering prayer is a method to assist us in becoming more sensitive to the Spirit within.

As Intention

Purity of intention is the primary focus of centering prayer—our intention to open ourselves to the mystery of God's presence beyond our thoughts and images and

emotions. As a receptive rather than an active form of prayer, the method helps us soften our human hesitations and supports our desire for union with the Divine.

We are all just ordinary people seeking deeper and more loving relationships with ourselves, with other persons, and with God. Living the wisdom of the contemplative path is a matter of faith active in love, not of a particular spiritual technique. The contemplative path is practice. It requires fidelity to a method or discipline, such as centering prayer, but the wonder of this prayer form is that we really don't have to analyze the method or the process. All we are asked to do is stay faithful to our prayer times.

As Transformation

Centering prayer is not just a nice little prayer form—it is a path toward transformation. When we are faithful to a stilling practice, the fruits of the transformation are seen in our lives. Fr. Keating once said that waiting on God in the practice of centering prayer strengthens our capacity for interior silence and makes us sensitive to the movements of the spirit in our daily lives. That leads to purification and puts us on the road to transformation. When we have that inner stillness, we want to be compassionate. When we have that interior silence, we want to have an open and unguarded heart. We want to companion. We want to serve. There is a desire to love. And it isn't a strain. There is movement within us. There is transformation. We want to embrace those contemplative values of silence, simplicity, and solitude, and the fruits of the spirit are born anew. Charity, compassion, tolerance, peace-making, and courage for social justice become

the desires of our heart. Out of the silence we want to extend ourselves.

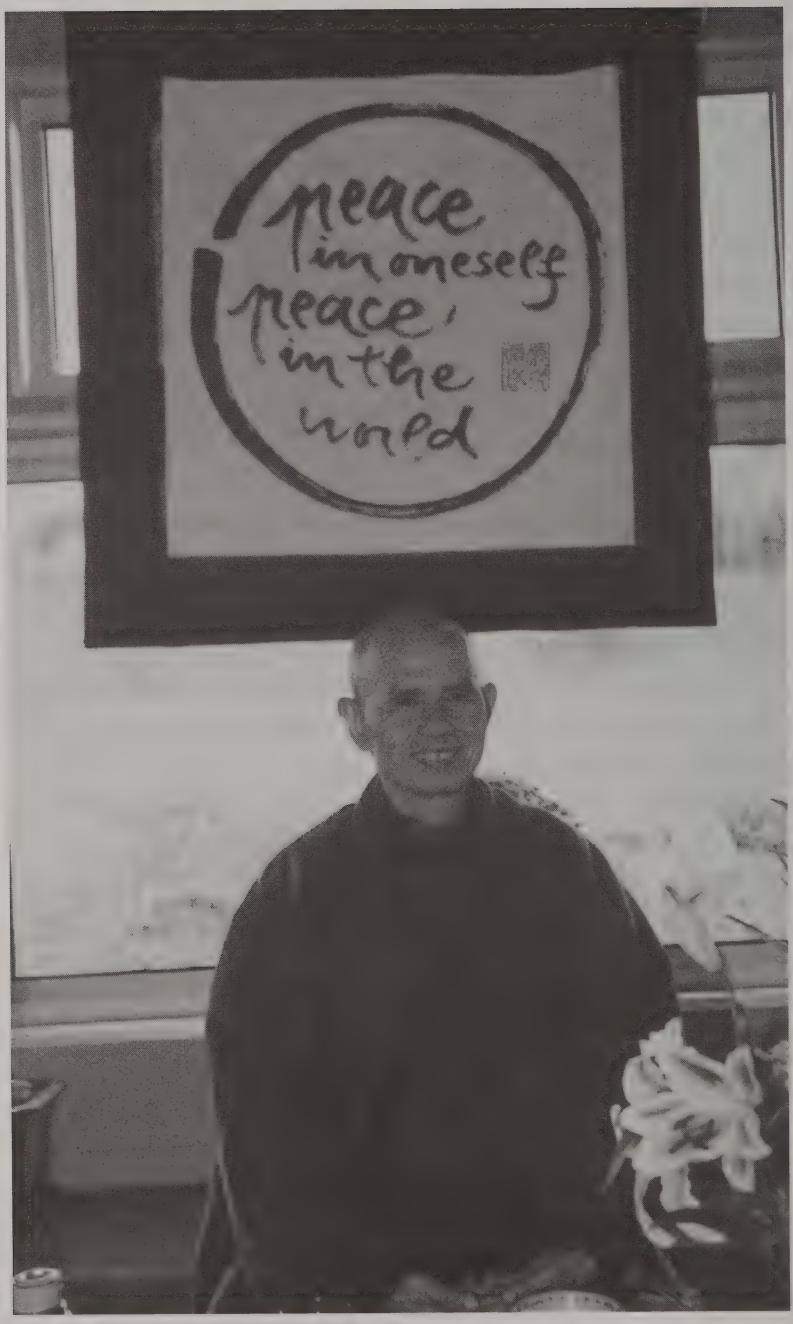
As Presence

The practice of being still and silent expands our awareness and gifts us with the desire and the grace to be present in the here and now. We have to be in the present moment. We desire to be in the present moment. We're graced to be in the present moment. When we are living from our center, from our deepest and truest selves, we are totally in this moment. We can't be anywhere else. It is one of the fruits of this practice.

At the same time, as we open our hearts to the Ultimate Mystery, we become more and more aware of the eternal, that which contains all time and no time, where the past and the future are present in the now, and only in the now—the eternal now.

Centering prayer is not just a method of prayer. It initiates a process that transforms us and how we meet and greet the world, a transforming process that creates a desire in us to be present in the now. May we be graced to stay faithful. May we nod to the Holy One's transforming process. May we embrace the Eternal Now.

This article was first published in the March-April 2004 issue of Radical Grace, *a bimonthly publication of the Center for Action and Contemplation* (www.cacradicalgrace.org) *in Albuquerque, New Mexico.*


peace
in oneself
peace
in the
world

To Be Grateful
and
The Highest Form of Prayer

Thich Nhat Hanh

TO BE GRATEFUL

During a conference on religion and peace, a Protestant minister came up to me toward the end of one of our meals together and said, "Are you a grateful person?" I was surprised. I was eating slowly, and I thought to myself, Yes, I am a grateful person. The minister continued, "If you are really grateful, how can you not believe in God? God has created everything we enjoy, including the food we eat. Since you do not believe in God, you are not grateful for anything." I thought to myself, I feel extremely grateful for everything. Every time I touch food, whenever I see a flower, when I breathe fresh air, I always feel grateful. Why would he say that I am not? I had this incident in mind many years later when I proposed to friends at Plum Village that we celebrate a Buddhist Thanksgiving Day every year. On that day, we practice real gratitude—thanking our mothers, fathers, ancestors, friends, and all beings for everything. If you meet that Protestant minister, I hope you will tell him that we are not ungrateful. We feel deeply grateful for everyone and everything.

Every time we eat a meal, gratitude is our practice. We are grateful for being together as a community. We are grateful that we have food to eat, and we really enjoy the food and the presence of each other. We feel grateful throughout the meal and throughout the day, and we express this by being fully aware of the food and living every moment deeply. This is how I try to express my gratitude to all of life.

THE HIGHEST FORM OF PRAYER

"Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father who is in heaven: for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." Many people pray to God because they want God to fulfill some of their needs. If they want to have a picnic, they ask God for a clear, sunny day. At the same time, farmers might pray for rain. If the weather is clear, the picnickers will say, "God is on our side; he answered our prayers." But if it rains, the farmers will say that God heard their prayers. This is the way we usually pray.

When you pray only for your own picnic and not for the farmers who need the rain, you are doing the opposite of what Jesus taught. Jesus said, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you . . ." When you look deeply into your anger, you will see that the person you call your enemy is also suffering. As soon as you see that, the capacity of accepting and having

compassion for him is there. Jesus called this "loving your enemy." When you are able to love your enemy, he or she is no longer your enemy. The idea of "enemy" vanishes and is replaced by the notion of someone who is suffering and needs your compassion. Doing this is sometimes easier than you might have imagined, but you need to practice. If you read the Bible but don't practice, it will not help much. In Buddhism, practicing the teaching of the Buddha is the highest form of prayer. The Buddha said, "If someone is standing on one shore and wants to go to the other shore, he has to either use a boat or swim across. He cannot just pray, "Oh, other shore, please come over here for me to step across!" To a Buddhist, praying without practicing is not real prayer.

The Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh is a world-renowned writer, scholar, spiritual leader, and Zen Buddhist monk. During the Vietnam war, he worked for reconciliation between North and South Vietnam, led the Paris Peace Talks' Buddhist delegation, set up relief organizations, and urged world leaders to use nonviolence as a tool to end the war. Martin Luther King, Jr. nominated him for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1967. Thich Nhat Hanh founded Plum Village, a monastic community and retreat center in France, as well as retreat centers in Vermont and California. His mission is to translate Buddhist teachings into everyday language that all can understand. He is the author of more than 40 books. He leads retreats worldwide on the art of mindful living. For more information see www.plumvillage.org.

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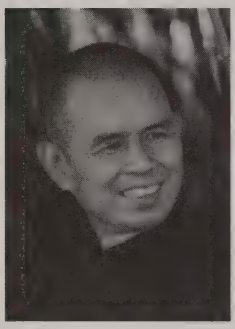
BOOK REVIEW



CREATING TRUE PEACE: Ending Violence in Yourself, Your Family, Your Community, and the World
by Thich Nhat Hanh
Published by Simon and Schuster, 2003, 208 pgs, paperback, web address:
www.simonsays.com
Reviewed by Michele Naphen

Throughout *Creating True Peace: Ending Violence in Yourself, Your Family, Your Community, and the World,* Thich Nhat Hanh, renowned Vietnamese Buddhist monk, emphasizes that within each one of us are the seeds for war, as well as the seeds for peace, and that we must water the seeds for peace. He offers guided meditations and other practices to help us learn the skillful means for doing so. These practices involve looking deeply, listening deeply, and acting carefully—with ourselves, our spouses, our children, our co-workers—rather than reacting quickly and mindlessly from misperceptions, misunderstandings, and emotions such as anger and fear.

Thich Nhat Hanh clearly and practically describes exercises for mindful breathing, walking, and speaking and listening with compassion; meditations for befriending and taking care of strong emotions; and practices for deep relaxation.

> We do not make war on our feelings or reject them, but just recognize, embrace, and transform them. When anger or fear is present in us, we bring awareness to it. We smile to it and call it by its true name. Hello, my fear, I know you are there. We can follow our mindful breathing to help calm our feelings. Breathing in, I am aware fear is present in me. Breathing out, I calm my feeling of fear.

Thich Nhat Hanh begins this book with the question, "What is true peace?" In his discussion of the answer, he says, "True peace . . . requires strength and practice, particularly in times of great difficulty. To some, peace and nonviolence are synonymous with passivity and weakness. In truth, practicing peace and nonviolence is far from passive."

Thich Nhat Hanh shares moving stories of ways that he and his students were able to create peace in the midst of the Vietnam war. In one story he describes how a young nun named Sister Chan Khong came upon a platoon of American soldiers searching for Communists in a village in 1968. She practiced awareness of her breath and responded to them calmly, clearly, and compassionately, resolving the situation peacefully.

He relates many other powerful stories of people's steps toward peace after learning mindfulness practices at his retreat center, Plum Village, in France. These include the transformation of a teacher's anger in the classroom by practicing mindfulness with his students; alleviation of arguments in a family of ten by using mindfulness practices; and the vows of a few dozen Israelis and Palestinians, after spending two weeks

together at Plum Village, to take what they learned back to their own communities.

> To practice peace, to make peace alive in us, is to actively cultivate understanding, love, and compassion, even in the face of misperception and conflict. Practicing peace, especially in times of war, requires courage. . . Peace is the practice of mindfulness, the practice of being aware of our thoughts, our actions, and the consequences of our actions. . . At this time, with so much conflict in the world, I am offering this book to help us realize that violence is not inevitable. Peace is there for us in every moment. It is our choice.

Thich Nhat Hanh believes that these practices—of being present and listening deeply to ourselves and others—can take place in schools, city halls, statehouses, Congress, and among nations. He envisions peace conferences where countries come together not as enemies, but as people who practice listening and speaking to one another as fellow human beings inhabiting the same planet. Imagine the possibilities for peace if governments and their citizens practiced this wise advice together.

Brooks Walsh & Jackie Beckett

ENDPIECE

Prayer for Heartsick Friends

Jana Orsinger

I want to spread out like the ocean, be big enough to hold all your suffering and sorrow and anger and outrage and exhaustion and grief, and still be only the steady and comforting tide, reassuring you with the endless rhythm of life and love.

I want to be the moon, always rising, even when clouds obscure the light, a presence, a companion, a friend in sorrow.

I want to be the whole night sky, the way it is above wild, quiet places, where the urgency and brightness of city life cannot obscure the brilliance that embraces Earth.

I want to be an ancient chant, stronger than the threat of death, fearless, rooted to the very beginning of all that is.

Jana Orsinger works as a nutrition therapist. She also teaches, writes, gardens, bakes, and contemplates the wonders of life and love. She has been a student of world religions since college days and considers herself a Taoist Buddhist Christian. She is a member of the Episcopal Church of Reconciliation in San

I want to be wide open, letting all the power of the universe, the ONE SONG, sing its music of mystery and wonder directly to your soul.

I want to strengthen you when you want strength and hold you when you want to crumble.

I want to be Love, washing over you and everyone in your household, being exactly what you need in every moment: laughter, tears, rest, action, transcendence, immediacy.

I want to be your next breath, the sturdy beating of your heart.

Antonio, Texas, but she sits in meditation daily, practices yoga, and has a great appreciation for all faith traditions. She and her husband, a builder, live in San Antonio where their little granddaughter is teaching them to live in the moment.

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